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UNCLAS FRANKFURT 006445

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SUBJECT: Hesse CDU Expulsion Marks Latest Chapter of Hohmann Scandal

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1. (U) SUMMARY: Hesse Christian Democrats (CDU) expelled Fulda member Martin Hohmann from the party on July 20 for an October 2003 speech comparing the actions of Soviet Bolshevik Jews during the Communist Revolution to Nazi involvement in the Holocaust. The CDU federal parliamentary caucus expelled Hohmann last November for the remarks. Hohmann will appeal the decision to the CDU's national party court. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Hesse CDU members stressed in their decision that Hohmann's greatest failure was refusing to distance himself from the speech after negative reaction from the media and the party. Hesse CDU General Secretary Michael Boddenberg noted that Hohmann could have prevented his expulsion by renouncing the anti-Semitic elements of his speech following the public uproar. Boddenberg added that he expects Hohmann to wage a long legal battle against the expulsion order.

3. (U) Hohmann indicated that, given the widespread negative public reaction, he now regretted giving the speech. He refused, however, to apologize for his remarks and maintained that the comparison of Soviet Bolshevik Jews to Nazis was historically accurate. Hohmann, who ironically received the most support of any Hesse CDU MP in the 2002 Bundestag elections, underscored his wish to stay in the CDU and called upon local members to remain in the party (NOTE: After Hohmann's exclusion from the national caucus in October, 150 Fulda Christian Democrats resigned in protest. END NOTE.) Hohmann ascribed the controversy to a "media witchhunt" and said that he would appeal the decision to the CDU's national party court.

4. (SBU) COMMENT: CDU head Angela Merkel solidified her hold on party leadership last year by making it clear through Hohmann's expulsion from the national caucus that the CDU would not tolerate anti-Semitism. Consequently, the Hesse CDU's decision to remove the Fulda MP comes as no surprise. What we do find surprising, however, is not only that the popular and traditionally-moderate Fulda MP was the one to make these anti-Semitic remarks, but also that some within the party so vocally defended Hohmann's assertions when the scandal broke. Hohmann remains in the Bundestag as an independent and his popularity within Fulda is largely undiminished. Although Hohmann has expressed his wish to remain with the CDU and fight expulsion proceedings, his support base in Fulda remains strong enough to make re-election to his seat as an independent in 2006 a real possibility. END COMMENT.